

THE FLORA AND FAUNA OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA HANDBOOKS COMMITTEE
10 MARCH 1921 – 30 OCTOBER 2001

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The Flora and Fauna of South Australia Handbooks Committee has been operating for 80 years producing a series of handbooks on the major elements of the South Australian natural environment. The main role of the Committee was to encourage and persuade specialists to write books on the flora and fauna for no financial reward. The completed manuscripts were then edited by members of the Committee and, in the past, were printed by State Print or its equivalent and published by the State Government Printer at the State Government's expense. Several years ago this part of the Government's operations ceased, with no provision made for the further printing of handbooks.

Since the privatisation of the Government Printer the Committee has sought other means to publish its books and the last two handbooks have been printed with the help of the Board of the Botanic Gardens ('Fungi') and the SA Research & Development Institute (Aquatic Sciences) ('Marine Invertebrates III'). However, it became very clear to the Committee that the only way it could continue was to establish a publications fund.

Initially, the State Government was approached because of its traditional support for the Committee, but this proved fruitless, although the Department of Environment & Heritage and the South Australian Museum did offer some support if funds could also be found from other sources. Various philanthropic trusts were approached and, although some were sympathetic, no funding was forthcoming. Similarly, all three of the State's universities, whose students and staff are amongst the main users of the handbooks, declined to assist. The formation of a partnership with a publisher was also considered, but rejected as it would potentially compromise the original intention of the Committee because handbooks with commercial potential would be favoured.

Left with no alternative, the Handbooks Committee reluctantly concluded that it could not continue to function as originally intended and should be disbanded. The last meeting of the Flora and Fauna of South Australia Handbooks Committee was accordingly held on 30 October 2001.

With the demise of the Handbooks Committee, which was once the envy of all other states, it is important to record its history and major achievements.

The Committee began in 1921 when Prof E. Wood-Jones, Prof T. B. G. Osborn and Prof J. B. Cleland presented the idea to the then Premier Mr H. Barwell. The concept was for authoritative handbooks to be written by experts in their field without remuneration, to be published by the Government Printer at its convenience, and to be sold at a low price so as to be affordable to the wider community. Here follows an extract recording the foundation of the handbooks series, prefacing Eichler's (1965) 'Supplement to J. M. Black's Flora of South Australia'.

After the first World War, the South Australian Branch of the British Science Guild was very active in devising ways for increasing scientific knowledge and its applications. At the time an up-to-date account of the Flora of our State was a pressing need. With this view, Professor J. B. Cleland suggested that the Science Guild might undertake to arrange for the preparation of a series of Handbooks dealing with the Fauna and Flora of South Australia. If these were prepared in an honorary capacity by leading authorities, the Government might well be asked to publish them, as it were, on a pound for pound basis. The Branch accepted the suggestion and it was arranged that a deputation of Professors F. Wood Jones, T. G. B. Osborn and J. B. Cleland should wait on the Hon. The Premier Mr., afterwards Sir Henry Barwell, with the proposal.

Fortunately Professor Cleland had prepared a memorandum on the subject in the following terms and this document was handed to the Premier on 25th February, 1921.

PROPOSED SCHEME FOR THE PREPARATION OF
HANDBOOKS ON THE FAUNA AND FLORA
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

- I. There is an almost complete lack in South Australia of any handbooks dealing with the Fauna and Flora of the State.
- II. In consequence, many individuals with scientific tastes are unable to develop these. This is a great loss to the State, as these persons, with suitable handbooks available, might be led on to contribute voluntarily to the State additions to scientific knowledge of great value to our pastoral, agricultural and other interests.
- III. A scheme under the auspices of the S.A. Branch of the British Science Guild is proposed for the preparation of a series of such handbooks to be edited by a sub-committee of experienced workers, the individual parts to be prepared by specialists (in an honorary capacity).
- IX. The scheme would be spread over a period of 10-15 years.
- X. Parts would be issued as completed by the authors. None could be available during this financial year. One or two may be so for 1921-1922.
- XI. The work involved will be highly skilled and laborious. In the interests of science the authors will be prepared, we believe, to devote their time and knowledge to this work without fee, if a means of publication can be obtained.
- XII. The value to the community of the works of these authors, thus offered as a gift to the State and world of science, can be put at a very high figure. Would the Government be prepared to accept this offer of gratuitous service and as a return – on the “pound for pound subsidy” principle – arrange for the publication of the Handbooks by the Government Printer?
- XIII. As the work will be spread over many years, this should not necessitate any additions to the staff of the Government Printer, the printing of the parts being proceeded with by him as opportunity offered. The actual out-of-pocket expense to the State would consist, under these circumstances, of the paper only. The parts as completed might be submitted to

the Premier or to the Minister of Education, and laid on the table of the House and ordered to be printed and thus be dealt with as Parliamentary Papers.

- IX. Many of the parts will require to be illustrated. In many cases, blocks are already prepared which doubtless could be used and so reduce expense.
- X. The educational value of these handbooks will be great. A copy of each might be placed with advantage in every public school in the State, when it could be made available not only to teachers and scholars but to the public of the district as well. To meet this demand and to enable distribution to be made to private individuals (at a nominal price to induce the wide use of these handbooks) about 1,500 copies of each should be printed.
- XI. Probably from 20 to 30 handbooks would eventually be published (over the period of 10-15 years), the sizes varying from about 20 to 150 pages according to subject matter.

Professor CLELAND, Adelaide University.

Professor WOOD JONES, Adelaide University.

The Premier read through the memorandum and said, “A very generous offer, gentlemen. I shall lay it before Cabinet.” Professor Cleland received from the secretary to the Premier, a letter dated 10th March, 1921 in the following terms accepting the offer.

“With reference to the proposed scheme under the auspices of the South Australian Branch of the British Science Guild for the preparation of a series of handbooks on the Fauna and Flora of South Australia which was submitted by yourself and Professor Wood Jones to the Premier on the 25th ultimo, I am directed by the Premier to inform you that in consideration of the contributors in the compilation of the handbooks undertaking the work in an honorary capacity the Government is prepared to undertake the printing of the publication at the Government Printing Office at the expense of the State.”

In recent years the Chief Secretary of South Australia decided that the Government Printer should publish the handbooks on a commercial basis, rather than that the Handbooks Committee should apply each year for a government grant for publication. Consequently there is now no delay in printing when the authors offer their completed manuscripts.

The British Science Guild has long since ceased to exist but the work of the Handbooks Committee survived until now. The main aim of the

Committee has always been to produce books that document, in a rigorously scientific way, the biological heritage of the State, although in recent years the Committee encouraged authors to broaden their focus to southern Australia in general. Perhaps the most outstanding work published by the Committee is the 'Flora of South Australia'. The remarkable J. M. Black produced the four-volume work single-handedly and revised the first three volumes, working until he was 96. Revision of the fourth volume was completed after his death. For South Australia's sesquicentenary a completely revised and rewritten new edition was produced, making this State the only one at the time to have a comprehensive up-to-date record of State flora.

There are also other monumental works for which other states have no equivalent (see list of handbooks) and, while some volumes are out of date, many have been updated or reprinted to meet the demand of scientists, naturalists and students. It seems remarkable that Hale's 'The Crustaceans of South Australia' (1927, 1929), reprinted in 1976, is still used as a basic text, although very much out of date and only providing a limited coverage of the group.

It is clear that the handbooks provide invaluable data for research workers, not only in South Australia, or even nationally, but internationally as well. Indeed, the handbooks series has been the envy of scientists in other states. Their contribution to secondary and tertiary education, as significant textbooks, is well recognised. For example, the four-part 'Flora', 'Fishes' and the three-part 'Marine Invertebrates of Southern Australia' series are essential texts for tertiary students. Unfortunately, the later volumes produced by the Government Printer were managed on a commercial basis and were remaindered within two years, so that they were only available for a relatively short period.

Future plans for new editions of 'Fishes', 'Amphibians', 'The Vegetation of South Australia', 'Crustacea' (as part of the 'Marine Invertebrates' series) and 'Flora' have been abandoned, although they may be taken up by others. In particular, the State Herbarium is in the process of producing an electronic version of the 'Flora', and the South Australian Research & Development Institute (Aquatic Sciences) intends to proceed with future volumes of the 'Marine Invertebrates' series as well as revising earlier volumes.

As part of the winding up process, the Committee has transferred copyright of the botanical texts to the Board of the Botanic Gardens

and State Herbarium, and of the zoological and ecological texts to the Board of the South Australian Museum. Copies of correspondence and minutes of the Handbooks Committee have been deposited with State Archives.

TITLES ISSUED BY THE FLORA AND FAUNA OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA HANDBOOKS COMMITTEE

- 1922 'Flora of South Australia'. Part I. Cyathaceae – Orchidaceae. J. M. Black. Second edition 1943. Reprinted 1948. Reprinted (facsimile) 1960, 1972. Third edition, Lycopodiaceae – Orchidaceae (revised by J. P. Jessop) 1978.
- 1923 'The Fishes of South Australia'. E. R. Waite. Reprinted 1962.
- 1923 'The Mammals of South Australia'. Part I. The Monotremes and the Carnivorous Marsupials. F. Wood-Jones. Reprinted in one volume with parts II (1924) and III (1925), with an Introduction by P. Crowcroft and a Selected Bibliography by J. H. Calaby 1968.
- 1924 'Flora of South Australia'. Part II. Casuarinaceae – Euphorbiaceae. J. M. Black. Second edition 1948. Reprinted 1963. Reprinted (facsimile) 1977.
- 1924 'The Mammals of South Australia'. Part II. The Bandicoots and the Herbivorous Marsupials. F. Wood-Jones. Reprinted in one volume with parts I (1923) and III (1925), as above, 1968.
- 1925 'The Building of Australia and the Succession of Life' with special reference to South Australia. Part I. W. Howchin.
- 1925 'The Mammals of South Australia'. Part III. The Monodelphia. F. Wood-Jones. Reprinted in one volume with parts I (1923) and II (1924), as above, 1968.
- 1926 'Flora of South Australia'. Part III. Meliaceae – Scrophulariaceae. J. M. Black. Second edition, Callitrichaceae – Plumbaginaceae 1952. Reprinted 1964. Reprinted (facsimile) 1977.
- 1927 'The Crustaceans of South Australia'. Part I. H. M. Hale. Reprinted in one volume with part II (1929) 1976.

- 1928 'The Building of Australia and the Succession of Life' with special reference to South Australia. Part II. Mesozoic and Cainozoic. W. Howchin.
- 1929 'Flora of South Australia'. Part IV. Bignoniaceae – Compositae. J. M. Black. Second edition, Oleaceae – Compositae (revised by E. L. Robertson) 1957. Reprinted (facsimile) 1980.
- 1929 'The Crustaceans of South Australia'. Part II. H. M. Hale. Reprinted in one volume with part I (1927) 1976.
- 1929 'The Reptiles and Amphibians of South Australia'. E. R. Waite.
- 1930 'The Building of Australia and the Succession of Life' with special reference to South Australia. Part III. Pleistocene. W. Howchin.
- 1934 'Toadstools and Mushrooms and other Larger Fungi of South Australia.' General introduction; Toadstools and Mushrooms. J. B. Cleland. Reprinted in one volume with part II (1935), including 'Notes on some Edible and Poisonous Fungi' by P. H. B. Talbot, 1976.
- 1935 'Toadstools and Mushrooms and other Larger Fungi of South Australia'. Polypores, Coral Fungi and remaining Hymenomycetes; Puff-balls, Jelly-like fungi, the larger Ascomycetes and Myxomycetes. J. B. Cleland. Reprinted in one volume with part I (1934), as above.
- 1936 'The Seaweeds of South Australia'. Part I. Introduction and The Green and Brown Seaweeds. A. H. S. Lucas.
- 1937 'The Vegetation of South Australia'. J. G. Wood.
- 1938 'The Molluscs of South Australia'. Part I. The Pelecypoda. B. C. Cotton & F. K. Godfrey.
- 1939 'Primitive Insects of South Australia'. Silverfish, Springtails and their allies. H. Womersley.
- 1940 'The Molluscs of South Australia'. Part II. Scaphopoda, Cephalopoda, Aplacophora and Crepipoda. B. C. Cotton & F. K. Godfrey.
- 1947 'The Seaweeds of South Australia'. Part II. The Red Seaweeds. A. H. S. Lucas & F. Perrin.
- 1959 'South Australian Mollusca'. Archaeogastropoda. B. C. Cotton.
- 1961 'South Australian Mollusca'. Pelecypoda. B. C. Cotton.
- 1962 'The Marine and Freshwater Fishes of South Australia'. T. D. Scott.
- 1964 'South Australian Mollusca'. Chitons. B. C. Cotton.
- 1965 'Supplement to J. M. Black's Flora of South Australia' (second edition 1943–1957). H. J. Eichler.
- 1966 'Aboriginal Man in South and Central Australia'. Part I. Edited by B. C. Cotton. Only one part was published.
- 1972 'The Vegetation of South Australia'. R. L. Specht. Second edition.
- 1974 'The Marine and Freshwater Fishes of South Australia'. T. D. Scott, C. J. M. Glover & R. V. Southcott. Second edition. Reprinted (facsimile, with 16 pp of colour plates) 1980.
- 1975 'Plant Feeding and other Bugs (Hemiptera) of South Australia'. Heteroptera Part I. G. F. Gross.
- 1976 'Plant Feeding and other Bugs (Hemiptera) of South Australia'. Heteroptera Part II. G. F. Gross.
- 1978 'Butterflies of South Australia'. R. H. Fisher.
- 1978 'Amphibians of South Australia'. M. J. Tyler.
- 1979 'Lichens of South Australia'. R. B. Filson & R. W. Rogers.
- 1980 'Mosses of South Australia'. D. G. Catcheside.
- 1980 'Acacias of South Australia'. D. J. E. Whibley.
- 1982 'Marine Invertebrates of Southern Australia'. Part I. Edited by S. A. Shepherd & I. M. Thomas.
- 1984 'Pysilloidea of South Australia'. F. D. Morgan.
- 1984 'The Marine Benthic Flora of Southern Australia'. Part I. H. B. S. Womersley.
- 1986 'The Dynamic Partnership: Birds and Plants in Southern Australia'. Edited by H. A. Ford & D. Paton.

- 1986 'Flora of South Australia. Volumes I-IV'. Edited by J. P. Jessop & H. R. Toelken. Fourth edition (third edition consisted of part I only).
- 1986 'The Ecology of Forests and Woodlands of South Australia'. Edited by H. R. Wallace.
- 1987 'The Marine Benthic Flora of Southern Australia'. Part II. H. B. S. Womersley.
- 1989 'Marine Invertebrates of Southern Australia'. Part II. Edited by S. A. Shepherd & I. M. Thomas.
- 1990 'Orchids of South Australia'. R. Bates & J. Z. Weber.
- 1992 'Acacias of South Australia'. D. J. E. Whibley & D. E. Symon. Second edition.
- 1994 'The Fishes of Australia's South Coast'. Edited by M. F. Gomon, J. C. M. Glover & R. Kuitert.
- 1997 'Larger Fungi of South Australia'. C. A. Grgurinovic.
- 1997 'Marine Invertebrates of Southern Australia'. Part III. Edited by S. A. Shepherd & M. Davies.

Dr Wolfgang Zeidler (Hon. Secretary), on behalf of the Flora and Fauna of South Australia Handbooks Committee — Em Prof William D. Williams (Chairman), Dr Sue Barker (Botanical Editor), Dr Margaret Davies (Zoological Editor), Dr Shelley Barker, Ms Robyn Barker, Dr John G. Conran, Mr Peter Copley and Dr Brian D. Morley.